percentage of the electorate identifying as strong partisans in the 1950s and 1960s was higher than the percentage identifying in the 2000s. Moreover, weak partisans have declined by almost 30% and independents/leaners have increased considerably in the last five decades—by 50%. These trends suggest that even if partisan identification and ideological labels are now unified, and even if their respective members are being polarized (which my colleagues and I argue is not the case sans a small fraction of elite electorate members), more and more Americans are choosing to take a centrist, nonparty label.

A final concern involves the authors' discussion of economic interests. Certainly pocketbook voting and economic concerns are always at the top of the list of important issues to Americans, but I wonder if McCarty et al. overstate the potency of economic interests and issues of redistribution to the electorate. While income levels may correlate and serve as strong predictors for partisan identification and voting patterns within the confines of their analysis, one can only wonder why a discussion of ideology, values, politics, and policy orientation was not more prominent—variables that have long been the backbone of political science's understanding of partisan choice and party systems and in shaping party identification and vote choice. One only needs to think of the Jewish vote and ideology, which remains solidly Democratic despite the community's affluence, or of the variance in ideology and behavior the Latino populations in Florida, Texas, and California. Their findings would be stronger if a clear statement as to why economic interests are so key here were articulated.

Despite these concerns and questions, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal have produced an incredibly important book that should be carefully and thoughtfully read by academics, pundits, politicians, and the interested public. The authors' examination of elite polarization—with particular focus on congressional polarization—is groundbreaking, and the associated implications of this elite polarization will no doubt influence and resonate in scholarly and, hopefully, public work in years to come. Of course, while not all of their conclusions are without controversy and alternative stories about polarization and the so-called culture war are prominent within the discipline, no discussion about polarization would be complete without considering and responding to the ideas set forth in this book.

Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation. By Suzanne Mettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 280p. $30.00 cloth, $15.95 paper.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071885

— Andrew J. Polsky, *Hunter College* and *The Graduate Center, CUNY*

Americans are not very good citizens—they do not participate actively in civic life, follow public affairs closely, or vote at a level comparable to other industrialized democracies. It has not always been this way, of course. A long line of commentators and scholars has celebrated the robust civic engagement demonstrated by Americans in the past; today, a cottage industry has developed to lament the sad state of contemporary citizenship and probe the causes of its decline. Scholars are not the only ones invested in explaining the downward trend in participation. The phenomenon has become a matter for ideological contestation, with conservatives (and some radicals) blaming the modern state for reducing citizens to passive dependents, while liberals insist the fault lies with other culprits such as the corporate media.

Into this debate steps Suzanne Mettler, with a welcome dose of empirical rigor in her excellent and stimulating new volume. It continues a line of inquiry she began in *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (1998), a study of how key New Deal programs treated their beneficiaries. She took particular note there of the messages about citizens' social worth that government programs communicate through their eligibility criteria and administration. In *Soldiers to Citizens,* Mettler extends her inquiry into how public policies shape citizenship, this time through the story of what was arguably the boldest and most successful piece of social legislation ever undertaken by the federal government, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights. *Dividing Citizens* pursued the impact of policies on citizenship only up to a certain point because scant information from beneficiaries themselves was available. Her new work explores more fully what the GI Bill meant to the veterans who participated in its various programs, thanks to an ambitious research program that involved surveys of veterans in selected units and follow-up interviews.

Mettler considers first the direct impact of GI Bill programs on the welfare and social status of the beneficiaries. Although the legislation contained other provisions, such as low-interest loans, the centerpiece was the educational component—programs designed to subsidize the participation of veterans in higher education and in noncollege training. All told, just over half of those who served in the military during the World War II, nearly eight million (mostly male) veterans, went to college or enrolled in other educational programs under the bill. Some would have gone to college or obtained vocational training even if the federal government were not picking up the tab, but not nearly so many and not so soon after the war. More than that, the consequences for veterans from families of modest means were profound: The GI Bill gave them an unprecedented boost up the social ladder and helped usher in an era of dramatically broadened membership in the middle class.

The direct effects of the bill, though important, are not Mettler's central concern. Rather, she seeks to examine

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707071885 Published online by Cambridge University Press

whether veterans' experiences as beneficiaries spilled over indirectly into their lives as members of their communities and as citizens in a democratic polity. Her data indicate that veterans who made use of GI Bill education and training programs were significantly more likely than other veterans to join civic organizations and become active in politics. This difference cannot be attributed entirely to the well-established relationship between educational attainment and political participation: When we control for educational level, veterans who went to school or learned a trade on the GI Bill were more likely than other veterans to become active in civic and public affairs. Mettler suggests that the bill's inclusive design, fair implementation, and transformative effects on the veterans' life chances "communicated to beneficiaries that government was for and about people like them, and thus it incorporated them more fully as citizens" (p. 106). These "interpretive effects" seem to have been most pronounced in the immediate aftermath of participation and then gradually weakened. Even so, because education and training also yielded "resource effects" in the form of skills that could be transferred readily to associations and politics, the GI Bill cohort remained engaged in civic life at a high level over time. The author also suggests that through their political participation, veterans contributed to the extension of welfare state coverage in the postwar era.

The gains realized under the GI Bill did not come without a substantial social cost, however, as Mettler carefully details. The civic organizations and unions in which white veterans participated did not open their doors to nonwhite veterans. Nor was better education an antidote to systemic forms of racial exclusion in the workplace. Above all, because the GI Bill applied only to those who had served in the military, the generous benefits went overwhelmingly to young men. The women who worked double shifts in the munitions factories during the war were left out entirely. As a direct result, the gains women had made in higher education since 1900 were wiped out overnight. Not until 1970 would college graduation rates for women return to their prewar level. Since education and training shaped career prospects and social status, moreover, the gendered effects of the GI Bill rippled through postwar American life.

Mettler contends that we can apply the lessons of the GI Bill to policy debates in our own era. An unabashed liberal, she defends public social provision as a vital link between citizens and the government in a liberal democracy. "Through the bestowal of social rights," she says, "citizens may become more fully incorporated as members of the political community. The extension of social provision may not only assure them some modicum of well-being but also convey to them a sense of dignity and value as citizens" (p. 119). In the book's conclusion, Mettler calls for a renewed commitment to affordable higher education and other programs that could revive faith in the American dream among disadvantaged groups. She adds that we ought to consider, too, how programs can be designed to promote a stronger sense of civic membership, such that beneficiaries will see themselves as respected members of the polity and reciprocate by sharing in its public life.

This is, unfortunately, the least satisfactory part of *Soldiers to Citizens.* Mettler demonstrates that the GI Bill contributed to the conditions that promoted participation in the postwar era, but as she realizes, other factors also mattered. Those other factors no longer exist, and there is little likelihood that more inclusive government social provision by itself could revive citizenship at the lower end of the social scale. Big government was not the enemy of civic engagement that some conservatives depict. But a modern counterpart to the GI Bill would be at best a small contribution to the restoration of the robust civic life the original helped to sustain.

Saving Democracy: A Plan for Real Representation in America. By Kevin O'Leary. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 394p. $50.00 cloth, $19.95 paper.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071897

— John Gastil, *University of Washington*

It is difficult to solve a problem to everyone's satisfaction when so few agree about the nature of the problem, let alone whether one exists. Such is the daunting task Kevin O'Leary faces in *Saving Democracy,* a book written to save us from a peril few onlookers see the same way, if they see it at all.

The democracy O'Leary hopes to save is our own American republic. He contends that the most unapologetic exporter of democracy fails to meet its Founders' own high standards for self-government. Our nation, he argues, has outgrown its political clothes, with each congressional district now representing not tens but hundreds of thousands of citizens. Representative government has become a distant abstraction for Americans, and it inspires little civic spirit or action. When rampant public apathy combines with a greedy upper class possessing "the desire and ability to manipulate . . . the public," O'Leary senses the meteorological conditions for "corruption's perfect storm" (p. 52). Thus, our system of government has become unaccountable, except to the most powerful special interests.

This diagnosis-by-metaphor should sound familiar, and many readers, like this author, share in the sense that representative government needs to become more efficient and competent at public-spirited lawmaking. We are fortunate that he provides a new reform for us to consider. Generous with acknowledgements (to Robert Dahl, Jim Fishkin, Ned Crosby, Athens, New England, and many others), O'Leary still has enough novelty in his proposal to warrant our attention.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707071885 Published online by Cambridge University Press